

## THE FRENCH ADMINISTRATION OF INDO-CHINA

finds Japan an ideal element in the Far East;  
economically, a dangerous  
rival

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### *Siam*

Out of a heterogeneous collection of tribes an orderly Asiatic state has emerged. While its neighbours and fellow Thais have fallen under foreign domination, the Kingdom of the White Elephant has remained a sovereign state, due to the mutual jealousy of England and France, but also to the superior qualities of its people and princes.

Since the days of Siam's embassy to Louis XIV, relations between the two countries had been cordial. The government of Napoleon III stupidly lost the opportunity of creating a Protectorate over Siam. Only a commercial treaty favourable to the missionaries came out of these abortive negotiations. French diplomacy continued to be weak when it recognized Siamese sovereignty over the Cambodian provinces of Angkor and Battambang (1868). It was natural for the Siamese to conclude that France was thoroughly occupied with Annam and that Metropolitan indifference was tantamount to hostility towards any colonial expansion, so they encroached more and more along the Mekong valley. Garnier's warnings about an eventually Siamese Laos were taken up and amplified by Pavie's explorations and advice. Certain dramatic incidents, involving the inevitable insult to the flag, aroused French public opinion to support an aggressive policy in Laos, even at the risk of offending England, who was backing Siam's intransigence. The Mekong, a French river, not a boundary, became the rallying cry of the opposing party. The traditional Anglo-French colonial rivalry was finding simultaneously different

points of tension  
both in Africa and in Asia.

Friction with Siam developed almost immediately over the execution of the 1893 treaty. When Doumer in 1899 returned a visit made two years before by the King of Siam, relations were not in the least improved. The French complained that Siam was not only breaking the treaty, that she had not renounced her territorial ambitions in Laos, but that advisers of every other nationality than French were being called to Bangkok in the reorganization of Siam. The repercussions of a Kha revolt in 1902 served as the occasion for reopening negotiations for a new Franco-Siamese treaty\* in which the pro-expansionists hoped to better France's Laotian position. Certain elements in France openly preferred a military to a diplomatic solution of the problem, and they loudly denounced the 1902 arrangement.